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FOURTH CIRCUIT UPHOLDS FEDERAL DEATH SENTENCE

GREENBELT, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced today that the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the convictions and death sentences of Dustin John Higgs, of Laurel Maryland for the 1996 murder and kidnapping of Tanji Jackson, Mishann Chinn and Tamika Black. In October 2000, a jury convicted Higgs of first degree premeditated and felony murder, kidnapping and use of a firearm in the commission of a crime of violence as to each victim. After hearing evidence of mitigating and aggravating factors, the jury unanimously recommended a sentence of death which was formally imposed by U.S. District Court Judge Peter J. Messitte on January 3, 2001.

After inviting the three victims to his Laurel apartment on January 26, 1996 Higgs became involved in an altercation with one of the victims. After the victims left, Higgs observed one of the victims writing down his tag number. Higgs picked up his .38 caliber handgun and instructed his friends Willis Mark Haynes and Victor Gloria to come with him. With Higgs driving his Mazda MPV, they stopped and Haynes offered the girls a ride home at which time the girls entered the van. After passing the exit to D.C., Higgs stopped the van on Route 197 in the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge

which is federal property. Higgs told the girls to get out of the vehicle. Higgs handed the .38 caliber gun to Haynes and told him to take care of the girls. Haynes exited the MPV and fired five shots, killing all three girls. Mishann Chinn was shot execution style, *i.e.*, contact shot to the back of the head. Tamika Black and Tanji Jackson were each shot twice, once in the heart. Haynes re-entered the van and fled the area, leaving all three bodies in the roadway.

Haynes was also charged with the murders and kidnappings. Haynes was convicted of all charges. However in June 2000, the jury was unable to reach a unanimous decision on the death penalty. As a result, in August 2000 Haynes was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of release. Gloria pled guilty to accessory after the fact and was sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment.

This case was investigated by the United States Park Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Deborah A. Johnston and Sandra Wilkinson with assistance from Joseph Uberman, formerly of the Department of Justice Capital Crimes Unit.